

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Glory of Christ Our King

INTRODUCTION

By our calendar, the story we are studying takes place near the end of March and the Jewish Passover is a week away. Passover remembers God's rescue of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. When God passed over Egypt in wrath, Israel was saved because they killed the spotless lamb and sprinkled its blood on the doorpost. Ever since, Israel has paused to remember that event.

Yet very soon the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, would be slain on this Passover on March 29th, A.D. 33. As we have noted, the plotting of Jesus' death has already occurred. Jesus now orchestrates this kingly entrance into Jerusalem. This is the very place he would suffer and die. The only problem was that there was a lot of confusion, both in the disciples and the crowd as to what was really going on here. **Ironically, the Pharisees were closer to the truth than you can imagine!**

THE MAIN POINT

"Jesus' procession into Jerusalem on a donkey was a prophetic act to counter the desire of the Jews for a nationalistic Messiah"¹ and establish the truth that He was King over all nations, indeed the "whole world".

READ: [JOHN 12:12-19 \(ESV\)](#)

THE EMPHASIS OF JOHN

If you were a police officer and were called to a vehicle collision at an intersection, upon interviewing witnesses you would be very surprised, if not concerned, if every witness gave exactly the same view of the accident, word-for-word as each other. You would think there is collusion – some deceit going on. You would expect to hear a similar account from each but with some variables. That is what we expect when we read the Gospel writers. Each one wrote about The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem; but each one was slightly different.ⁱ John's record is clearly harmonious, yet unique to the other Gospel writersⁱⁱ. John focuses more on the reaction than the event itself.

¹ Osborne, G. R. (2018). [John: Verse by Verse](#). (J. Reimer, E. Ritzema, D. Thevenaz, & R. Brant, Eds.) (p. 294). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

THE EXPOSITION

The Convergence of Two Crowds

John's account of the Palm Sunday entrance is the briefest of all the Evangelists. The crowd is there for this important Passover feast. We learn from the Jewish historian, Josephus, that at one Passover there were in excess of two and a half million people in Jerusalem.² John will tell us that the reason these people came to see Jesus was because they had heard of the raising of Lazarus. A crowd also had followed Jesus out of Bethany, but these seemed of purer motives as they bore witness to the miracle that Jesus performed. Perhaps they were among those who had believed in Jesus ([John 12:11](#)).

So, we have an interesting convergence of two crowds, possibly a group of questioners and a group of believers. The crowds converged adjacent to the Mount of Olives, according to the other Gospels. This would be the place where Jesus wept over Jerusalem. This would be the place where He would ascend back to His Father. The crowds starting singing part of the Jewish Hallel ([Psalm 113-118](#)). They sang:

"Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord." (Psalm 118:25–26, ESV)

These words were often sung at Jewish feasts and here they bear an important significance. "The crowds do not simply pronounce a blessing in the name of the Lord on the one who comes, but pronounce a blessing on the one who comes in the name of the Lord."³ There was no doubt that the crowd was hoping that Jesus was their promised Messiah.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

John will tell us that "Jesus found a donkey and sat on it." We know that he "found it" by sending two disciples to get it. But as do all the Evangelists, John points out that what Jesus was doing was fulfilling prophecy. There can a wrong assumption that the prophecy spoken of is one Old Testament verse. Many think that it is a citation from Zechariah 9:9, but note that verse in context:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9–10, ESV)

² "The *great crowd* is made up of pilgrims who have come to Jerusalem *for the Feast*, i.e. for Passover. Josephus (*Bel.* vi. 422–425) describes one Passover, just before the Jewish War (ad 66–70), when 2,700,000 people took part, not counting the defiled and the foreigners who were present in the city. Even if his numbers are inflated, the crowds were undoubtedly immense." - Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 431). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

³ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 432). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

If read in context we note that “The coming of the gentle king is associated with the proclamation of peace to the nations, extending his reign to the ends of the earth. The latter half of Zechariah 9:10 is itself a quotation from Psalm 72:8, which promises a world-wide reign for Zion’s king, a son of David.”⁴

Also, John doesn’t start the quote with “rejoice greatly”. In fact, he cites “do not be afraid” which is likely from Isaiah 40:9-11, which reads:

“Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.” (Isaiah 40:9–11, ESV)

The prophecy of Isaiah reminds us that Christ comes, not only as a conquering king, but also a generous and gracious provider, but more importantly the Good Shepherd who will gather His sheep into one fold (John 10:16).

One can readily see that in Christ’s mind this entrance proclaimed far more than nationalistic Israel had hoped.

If I am correct in my interpretation, the Gospel writers interpreted Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem by using Zechariah and Isaiah to in fact counter the Jewish hopes for a nationalistic messiah and to properly interpret the event as Christ’s foreseeing His universal kingship.

The Reaction

Now John adds insight on the reactions of several groups. Note first his comment about himself and the other disciples: *“His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.”* (John 12:16, ESV). This is another theme that John points out in his Gospel (confirm: [2:22](#)). Some truths didn’t make sense until Christ rose from the dead and ascended back to Heaven and the Holy Spirit was given. This was one. As I noted in the Introduction, the Pharisees were closer to the truth:

“So the Pharisees said to one another, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.”” (John 12:19, ESV)

Of course, they were using hyperbole – an overstatement. In their frustration and exasperation with Jesus, it seemed to them that everyone was turning to Christ. Again, we have an example of someone

⁴ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 433). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

saying something and not fully realizing all they were saying. The point of the entrance was in fact to proclaim that Jesus is King over the whole world. The crowd was hoping that Jesus would be king of Israel. But these Pharisees unwittingly saw the truth: Jesus would reign over the whole earth.

APPLICATION

To restate the main point: Jesus' procession into Jerusalem on a donkey was a prophetic act to establish the truth that He was King over all nations, indeed the "whole world". Indeed, after the glorification of Christ, the whole world would be impacted by the Gospel. John gives us a hint of this, as we will see in the next section of this chapter. The Greeks will be looking for Jesus.

His universal kingship would not be brought about by his military victory but by his death. Upon Christ's ascension we read that His Father said to him: *"I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."* (Psalm 2:7-8, ESV). The famed songwriter wrote these familiar words⁵:

Jesus shall reign wherever the sun
Does its successive journeys run
His kingdom spread from shore to shore
'Til moons shall wax and wane no more

One of the key messages of the Bible, extending from creation through to Abraham, Israel and the Church is God's great purpose of blessing all the nations. Making people aware of this is a huge chunk of proclaiming the Gospel. The Gospel according to Jesus was this: *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* (Mark 1:15, ESV). The mission of the Church is to announce the reign of Christ to the world. The New Testament picks up this truth from Isaiah where we read in Romans 10:15b (ESV):

"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

But let us read the whole verse as Isaiah writes it: *"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns.""* (Isaiah 52:7, ESV)

We have a responsibility to proclaim the Good News:

Announce the Good News that sinners can receive freely by faith the righteousness of God.

Announce the Good News that sinners can be forgiven all their sin.

Announce the Good News that sinners can be empowered by the indwelling Spirit to live holy lives before God.

⁵ Isaac Watts, © Words: Public Domain

Announce the Good News that sinners can be objects of Christ's on-going intercession.

AND

Announce the Good News that sinners can share in Christ's Kingdom of peace, joy, sinlessness, justice and unhindered fellowship with God.

Tell your friends: "Our God reigns".

Show your friends through your life: "Our God reigns".

ⁱ Differences in the Gospel authors. Only John mentions that the crowd that met Jesus had come to the Feast. The other writers locate the event as when Jesus was approaching Jerusalem from Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives. John writes that Jesus found the donkey and sat on it. The other Gospel writers record that Jesus sent two of his disciples to get the donkey. Matthew chooses not to note that the donkey Jesus rode on had never been ridden. It was unbroken. John simply records that it was a young donkey. John doesn't include the instruction of Jesus as to what to say if someone asks them why they are taking the donkey.

John records nothing of the donkey being picked up. Matthew tells us that the disciples did as Jesus directed. Mark and Luke specify exactly the conversation that took place when the disciples picked up the colt. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us that the disciples put their cloaks on the donkey as well as many of the crowd. Only Matthew and Mark mention that leafy branches were also spread before Jesus as He entered. John specifies that they were palm branches. Both Matthew and John tell us that this is a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy. And all four Gospel writers report that the crowd sang from Psalm 118 as Jesus entered.

All the Gospel writers record a different reaction to this event. Matthew reports that the crowds asked, "Who is this?". And he reports that the crowd also answered that this is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth. Mark simply records that Jesus went into the city, looked at the Temple and then went back to Bethany. Luke tells us that the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples and Jesus said famously, "If these were silent the stones would cry out." John gives us a different slant. He writes that the disciples didn't understand what was going on here until after the resurrection. John identifies two crowds: a crowd who bore witness to the raising of Lazarus following Jesus into Jerusalem and a crowd that came out from Jerusalem because they had heard of this miracle. John also reports the dismay of the Pharisees that so many were following Jesus.

ⁱⁱ John's Emphasis. As I seek to expound John's Gospel, let me identify with you the different emphasis that John places upon this story:

1. John tells us why there are so many people in Jerusalem. It's because of the Feast. The Feast is Passover. John has organized his Gospel around several feasts portraying Jesus the Messiah in relation to them.ⁱⁱ
2. John reports that Jesus found the donkey, emphasizing his choice. This event was ordained and orchestrated by God in Christ for a divine purpose.
3. John specified the leafy branches as palm branches. Palm leaves would have a significant symbolism for these Jews commemorating military victory.
4. John identifies the two crowds that converge.
5. John comments on the uncertainty of the disciples to this event. We learn that it was only after the glorification of Jesus, that they understood what this really meant.
6. John adds to Luke's account of the reaction of the Pharisees. This of course moves the murderous plot to kill Jesus further down the diabolical road.